

# The Boston Globe

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## On the surface, this Derby appears up for grabs

By Mark Blaudschun

GLOBE STAFF

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The primaries are over. Each of the candidates, coming from Florida, California, Illinois, Kentucky, New York, and Louisiana, stated their cases. Each offered legitimate arguments why they could win.

And yet each displayed flaws. And that doesn't factor in the frenzy that will be present today: a full field of 20 horses and more than 150,000 spectators.

Welcome to the 134th running of the Kentucky Derby, a 1¼-mile test of endurance, maturity, and skill that will start the Triple Crown season.

The morning-line favorite is Big Brown, who is also the choice of the handicappers who live and die by the numbers. Three wins by a combined 29 lengths. Eye-popping, triple-digit Beyer figures through the prep season, which ended with a victory in the Florida Derby, the same launching pad Barbaro took two years ago.

"He is the fastest horse in the race," said Big Brown's trainer, Rick Dattow. "We're the horse to beat and I feel confident that we're going to win the race."

In controlled conditions, that may very well be true. But the Kentucky Derby is anything but controlled, as the tension increases

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### Staff Derby picks

MARK BLAUDSCHUN

1. **Colonel John.** Monster race to win Santa Anita Derby and monster workout on dirt at Churchill Downs make him the shaky choice.
2. **Pyro.** Forget the Blue Grass. He didn't like the track. And he's won at Churchill.
3. **Monba.** Pletcher is the best trainer never to have won the Derby. Monba could change that.

JOE SULLIVAN

1. **Recapturetheglorry.** Was the surprise winner of the Illinois Derby and 3-year-olds can sometimes pair up big efforts.
2. **Monba.** A similar theme. His victory in the Blue Grass Stakes was his best effort to date and he'll follow it up with another.
3. **Pyro.** He's too good not to rebound from a bad race in the Blue Grass.

## Suffolk optimistic about new season

By Nancy Marrapese-Burrell

GLOBE STAFF

Churchill Downs won't be the only place celebrating thoroughbred racing today. Suffolk Downs opens its season this afternoon with 10 live races leading up to simulcasting the Kentucky Derby. Post time at the East Boston track is 12:55 p.m., with doors opening at 10 a.m.

Chip Tuttle, chief operating officer at Suffolk Downs, said everyone at the track is excited to get going again.

"There's always a sense of renewal with any opening day," he said. "The fact that ours falls on the same day as the Kentucky Derby is very positive in terms of the vibe and the feel."

Today is an important day for the track, another being Sept. 20, the day of the Massachusetts Handicap.

"There are four or five times a year when it's great to be a horse player and this is one of them," said Tuttle. "Especially for us in New England, the Triple Crown

events, and the MassCap, and the Breeders' Cup, and some of the bigger days from Saratoga. We'll have a good, enthusiastic crowd. Every day for the last few years, we've had more and more people show up on opening day, so we're hoping that trend continues as well."

One reason for the change is the proactive influence of Richard Fields, the newest member of the ownership group.

"For a few years, I think the mind-set was, 'Hold on and let's see what happens,'" said Tuttle. "Richard is not a 'let's hold on' type of guy. [His attitude was] we're going to do things, we're going to try things. We're going to do the right things and if they don't work, we're going to try something else. So it's a different mind-set and people are responding to it. We've seen fans respond to it with the boost in attendance we got last year. And we've seen horsemen respond to it this year in terms of their increasing numbers on the backstretch and their commit-

ment to New England racing.

"We know the main attraction on a day like [today] is the Kentucky Derby. We're going to have some quality local horses who, hopefully, people are going to be able to follow through the entire summer here."

In addition to the races, the track is offering some fan-friendly features such as a handicapping seminar for beginners after the first race.

As much as there is optimism with a new season beginning, it's also a difficult time in the racing industry. Former WBZ sportscaster Bob Neumeier, who will serve as analyst during NBC's coverage of the Derby, said he believes racing in this area will continue to face an uphill battle.

"I'd like to say yes [there has been a resurgence in racing here]," said Neumeier. "But I think the reality is no. I think that's a problem that a lot of tracks like Suffolk Downs throughout the country face. They're fighting like heck for their share of the pie. Many tracks

are looking at slot machines to try to boost handle and raise awareness because people seem to like to gamble on slot machines perhaps more so than they do betting on the race."

"Suffolk, like many other tracks and venues across the country, have politically tried to put in slot machines to help the game. They've put them in Louisiana and Pennsylvania, and we've seen bumps in handles in all three of those locales. Until they do that in Boston, I think Suffolk Downs will be fighting tooth and nail to maintain its existence."

Suffolk Downs is introducing the Fan Photo Experience, which will enable people to get their photos taken with a horse and jockey. The area, located at the main clubhouse entrance, will be open Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays when there is live racing. Normal hours are 12:15-2:15 p.m., with expanded hours on special racing days.